

## **The parish elite at play? Cricket, community and the 'middling sort' in eighteenth-century Kent**

In the past twenty years a considerable amount of work has been undertaken on the 'middling sort' in eighteenth-century England.<sup>1</sup> This amorphous social group, stretching between the labouring classes on the one hand and the lower reaches of the gentry on the other, has formed a key element in discussions of the social, economic and political history of urban England during this period. The new culture of association that characterised middling sort life in towns has been subject to particular scrutiny. Historians such as Jonathan Barry have shown how the middling sort came to rely upon 'a network of social and institutional relationships' within their respective towns that took in business partnerships, charities and friendly societies, political clubs, learned societies, local government, and, of course, the churches.<sup>2</sup> The values 'embedded in

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<sup>1</sup> Scholarly interest in the middling sort predates this, but, as Perry Gauci has written, the appearance of *The middling sort of people: culture, society and politics in England* (Basingstoke, 1994) edited by Jonathan Barry and Colin Brooke, galvanised the field. Its 'chapter themes read like a charter for middling studies for the next generation of scholars (and beyond)': Perry Gauci, 'Finding the middle-ground: the middling sort in the eighteenth century', *History Compass*, 4/2 (2006), p. 230. Margaret Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender, and the Family in England, 1680-1780* (Berkeley, 1996); H. R. French, *The Middle Sort of People in Provincial England, 1600-1750* (Oxford, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Barry, 'Bourgeois Collectivism? Urban Association and the Middling Sort' in *The middling sort of people*, pp. 95, 103-104. Peter Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance: Culture and Society in the Provincial Town, 1660-1770* (Oxford, 1990); John, Smail, *The Origins of Middle Class Culture: Halifax, Yorkshire, 1660-1780* (Ithaca, NY, 1994); Carl Estabrook, *Urbane and Rustic England:*

associational life', he argues, taught members how to negotiate the dialectic tension between 'self control and obedience to others, between competition and cooperation, between restraint and liberality': they provided a 'prudential code for bourgeois life'.<sup>3</sup> As such, the associational culture of the middling sort was central to how eighteenth-century towns operated, bolstering both civic and bourgeois identities.<sup>4</sup>

While England's growing towns were the natural habitat of the middling sort, a growing body of literature has dealt with the highly gendered experience of equivalent social groups in the public life of rural areas. Joan Kent and Henry French, for example, have demonstrated the extent to which the 'chief inhabitants' of the parish – the male farmers, superior rural tradesmen and artisans - dominated the key offices in the vestry, the seat of parish government, while Steve Hindle has argued that the same social group increasingly dominated key rituals of local life, such as beating the bounds of the parish. By the end of the seventeenth century, he suggests, they 'had effectively appropriated to

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*Cultural Ties and Social Spheres in the Provinces, 1660-1780* (Manchester, 1998); Brian Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee: the Emergence of the British Coffeehouse* (New Haven, 2005); Holger Hock, 'From Beefsteak to Turtle: Artists' Dinner Culture in Eighteenth-Century London', *Huntingdon Library Quarterly*, 66 (2003), pp. 27-54; Henry French, 'Social Status, Localism and the "Middle Sort of People" in England, 1620-1750', *Past & Present*, 166 (2000), pp. 99-100. For the sheer range of clubs and associations in Georgian England, Peter Clark, *British Clubs and Societies, 1580-1800: The origins of an associational world* (Oxford, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> Barry, 'Bourgeois Collectivism?', pp. 101-102.

<sup>4</sup> Barry, 'Bourgeois Collectivism?', p. 95.

themselves the identity of the community'.<sup>5</sup> Historians of music and popular culture, meanwhile, such as Vic Gammon and Jameson Wooders, have also emphasised the extent to which men of the 'middling sort' dominated village musical life and activities like morris dancing.<sup>6</sup> In sum, the middling sort seem to have been as influential in the countryside as they were in the towns of Georgian England.

In this article, the engagement of the rural middling sort with a different area of associational activity will be explored: cricket.<sup>7</sup> The game became increasingly popular across south-east England during the eighteenth century, and whilst we know a good deal about the so-called 'great matches' sponsored by aristocratic patrons, few sources have survived to illuminate the progress of the

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<sup>5</sup> Steve Hindle, 'Beating the bounds of the parish: order, memory and Identity', in Michael J. Halvorson and Karen E. Spierling (eds.), *Defining Community in Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT, 2008), p. 216.

<sup>6</sup> Jameson Wooders, "'With snail shells instead of bells': music, morris dancing, and the "middling sort" of people in eighteenth-century Berkshire', *Folk Music Journal*, 10 (2015), pp. 563-5.

<sup>7</sup> Good general histories include: Christopher Brookes, *English Cricket: the game and its players through the ages* (London, 1978), pp. 34-66; Derek Birley, *A Social History of English Cricket* (London, 1999), pp. 11-58. More nuanced accounts include; David Underdown, *Start of Play: Cricket and Culture in Eighteenth Century England* (London, 2000); Rob Light, 'Cricket in the Eighteenth century:' in *The Cambridge Companion to Cricket* (CUP, 2011), pp. 26-40; Peter Davies and Robert Light, *Cricket and Community in England: 1800 to the present day* (MUP, 2013), pp. 13-35.

game at a humbler level.<sup>8</sup> The discussion that follows focuses on a remarkable set of late eighteenth-century scorecards which offer an unprecedented insight into the village game. The scorecards record the outcome of seven matches played by a club from the Kentish village of Wingham during the summer of 1773. By setting them alongside other sources, including Militia lists, land tax assessments, electoral registers, vestry books, newspapers, and the range of resources available on the family history website, Ancestry.co.uk, which includes registers of birth, marriages and deaths, wills and family trees,<sup>9</sup> it is possible to establish the lineaments of this cricketing community and the social and cultural networks that supported it. As will be seen, the impetus for village cricket came from precisely the same group that increasingly dominated the political, cultural and ritual life of these rural communities – the middling sort – and drew on the wider, regional networks of which these individuals were part.

The article adopts an immersive, almost micro-historical approach to the interpretation of the records. The first section establishes a bridge with the existing historiography by locating Wingham's middling sort within the structures of parish land-holding and administration, identifying the major farmers and tradesmen, and the dynastic patterns of service within the vestry. With this broad context in place, attention turns to the cricketers of Wingham,

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<sup>8</sup> Birley, *English Cricket*, pp. 26-40; Neil Tranter, *Sport, Economy and Society in Britain, 1750-1914* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 95.

<sup>9</sup> The Ancestry.com website is under-used by professional historians: Ann Curthoys, 'Crossing Over: academic and popular history', *Australasian Journal of Popular Culture*, 1 (2011), pp. 11-12.

their social backgrounds and the social composition of the teams they played against. Section three sets this cricketing community within a wider historiographical context and asks what the evidence from Wingham suggests about the nature of the rural middling sort, their relationship to one another and to the parishes in which they resided.

## **I Wingham**

The Kentish village of Wingham sits in open upland country some six and a half miles east of Canterbury on the high road to the Cinque Ports of Sandwich and Deal. At the first Census in 1801, the enumerators recorded a population of 844, though it would have been smaller in the 1770s. Agriculture played an important role in the economic life of the parish, but the village was also a significant centre for the surrounding region.<sup>10</sup> It hosted the regular Petty Session for the Wingham division and supplied a range of services to neighbouring parishes; a range of crafts and trades was, correspondingly, well established in the village.

Wingham was thus a place where the middling stratum of society might be expected to flourish. No records exist from which to reconstruct a complete social profile of the inhabitants, but the potential scope of 'middling sort' occupations is hinted at in the annual Militia list.<sup>11</sup> The list enumerated all able-

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<sup>10</sup> John Boys, *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Kent* (Brentford, 1794), p. 41. Boys died in Wingham and was a brother in law by marriage to the leading family of tenant farmers in the parish, the Matsons: *Gentleman's Magazine*, 95 (1825), p. 86., 'John Boys esq.'

<sup>11</sup> Kent Record Office [hereafter KRO], L/M, 4/10, ff. 70, 73, 74.

bodied men between 18 and 45 eligible for service in the Militia; that compiled for Wingham in 1773 also noted each man's occupation.<sup>12</sup> Almost half the men listed in the return (51 of 101) worked as labourers or servants.<sup>13</sup> Beyond this, the return detailed several people with purely agricultural occupations - four farmers, six farmers' sons, and a shepherd - and a larger number of skilled craftsmen or tradesmen: six carpenters; five cordwainers; three each of blacksmiths, bricklayers, and butchers; two coopers; a baker, a barber, a brick-maker, a chair-maker, a gardener, a glazier, a glover, a miller, a weaver, and a wheelwright. A gentleman and a coachman made up the number. While the nature of the Militia list precludes any definitive delineation of Wingham's middling sort, the diversity of local economic activity hints at the likely breadth of this group.

In terms of its land-owning structure, Wingham, like its neighbours, would be classified as relatively 'open' - that is, a parish in which no single propertied interest predominated to the exclusion of others.<sup>14</sup> The most

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<sup>12</sup> Matthew McCormack, *Embodying the Militia in Georgian England* (Oxford, 2015) offers the best modern account.

<sup>13</sup> Agricultural labourers in East Kent earned 1s 6d to 1s 8d: Boys, *General View*, p. 42.

<sup>14</sup> Dennis Mills, *Lord and Peasant in Nineteenth Century Britain* (London, 1980); B A Holderness, "'open" and "close" parishes in England in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries' *Agricultural History Review*, 20 (1972), pp. 126-39; S Banks, 'Nineteenth century scandal or twentieth century model? A new look at "open" and "close" parishes', *Economic History Review*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ser., 41 (1988), 51-73.

important residents were the Oxendens of Dene.<sup>15</sup> Their holding in Wingham, however, was quite modest: valued at just £359 in the 1780 Land Tax Assessment, it was only slightly more than that of the other important resident family, the Cosnans of Wingham House (£276).<sup>16</sup> The largest holding in the parish actually belonged to the non-resident Earl Cowper (£488), but perhaps as significant as any of the large holdings was the broad mass of smaller owners. In 1780, the property held by the 67 occupiers assessed at £1-50 was valued at £557, larger than that of the biggest aristocratic holding. There is no suggestion that the small holders felt a sense of common identity or necessary opposition between their own interests and those of the large landowners. As Jonathan Barry has suggested, whilst the middling sort saw themselves as 'fundamentally *free*' in a way which the poor, for example, were not, yet they recognised that 'freedom and independence' were 'conditioned by duties and dependence'.<sup>17</sup> Among these, in the case of Wingham, was the deference they owed their landlords and their social betters. At the contested election for Kent in 1734, for example, the poll books reveal that all 22 Wingham voters cast uniform ballots in favour of the Whig candidates supported by the Dene interest - despite the fact

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<sup>15</sup> For the Oxendens, W. Betham, *The Baronetage of England* (London, 1803), 3, p. 31. For Sir George Oxenden, L. Namier, *The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III*, 2 vols, (London, 1929), i, p. 85, n.1.

<sup>16</sup> KRO, Q/RP/418/55 Wingham Land Tax Assessment, 1780. [All subsequent citations of the Wingham Land Tax Assessment of 1780 refer to this document.] For Cosnan: *Universal Magazine*, 25 (1759), p. 208, *London Chronicle*, 11, p. 519, May 29-1 June 1762

<sup>17</sup> Jonathan Barry, "Bourgeois collectivism? Urban association and the middling sort", in Barry and Brooks (eds.), *The middling sort of people*, p. 103.

that few had any direct connection with the Oxenden estate.<sup>18</sup> At the next contest, in 1754, Wingham's 14 voters followed the same course.

If families like the Oxendens provided the high-level leadership of the parish, control of everyday affairs devolved, in Wingham as elsewhere, to the parishioners themselves in the vestry.<sup>19</sup> As Henry French has remarked, 'parish office was the administrative experience *par excellence*' of this group,<sup>20</sup> and while by no means all members of the 'middling sort' chose to serve in the vestry,<sup>21</sup> an examination of the Wingham vestry books immediately reveals that local administration was conducted by the larger occupiers of property rather than by its owners. Of the 25 families listed in the 1780 Land Tax return as renting

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<sup>18</sup> *The Poll for Knights of the Shire ...* (London, 1734); *The Poll for Knights of the Shire ...* (London, 1754). For electoral politics in this period, F. O'Gorman, *Voters, Patrons and Parties: the unreformed electoral system of Hanoverian England* (Oxford, 1989) John Phillips, *Electoral Behaviour in Unreformed England: Plumpers, Splitters and Straights* (Princeton, 1982); L. Namier & J. Brooke, *The House of Commons, 1754-1790*, 3 vols. (London, 1964), ii, p.73; HCF Lansberry (ed.), *Government and Politics in Kent, 1640-1914* (Woodbridge, 2001), p. 41.

<sup>19</sup> David Eastwood, *Government and Community in the English Provinces, 1700-1870* (London, 1997), pp. 42-9; W. M. Jacob, *Lay People and Religion in the Early Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 9-12.

<sup>20</sup> French, *The Middle Sort of People*, p. 252. See also Jan Pitman, 'Tradition and exclusion: parochial office-holding in early modern England: a case study from North Norfolk, 1580-1640', *Rural History*, 15 (2004), pp. 27-45; Alistair Mutch, 'Custom and personal accountability in eighteenth-century South Nottinghamshire church governance', *Midland History*, 36 (2011), pp. 69-88.

<sup>21</sup> French, 'Social status', pp. 73-4.



property assessed at more than £10 in 1780, representatives of 18 acted as either churchwardens or overseers of the poor at some stage between 1750 and 1790.<sup>22</sup> If the three women in the list are subtracted, approximately 80% of the men in this group served at least one of the two most important offices in the parish.<sup>23</sup>

Who families who provided the administrative elite within the parish were unified not only by a certain level of prosperity: they were also connected by marriage and bonds of friendship, frequently signing one another's wills, for example, or acting as executors. The most prominent occupiers in the parish were the Matsons of Wingham Court. In 1780, the main family holding comprised land valued at £434, rented from the Cosnans and the Oxendens;<sup>24</sup> a son, also named Charles, and the mainstay of the cricket team, held another property with a rateable value of £63 from Earl Cowper, bringing the total rateable value of Matson holdings in Wingham to nearly £500. The Matsons also leased the great and small tithes of the parish from Cowper, and owned some property in their own right, including a number of cottages in Wingham, two farms in nearby Nonnington, and sundry small parcels of land elsewhere.<sup>25</sup> As

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<sup>22</sup> CCA, Reference to the Parish churchwardens accounts and overseers accounts. book

<sup>23</sup> French, 'Social status', p. 79. The Wingham vestry books offer no details of smaller, 'select' groups. Mutch, 'Custom and personal accountability', p. 75.

<sup>24</sup> For a genealogical overview of Judith Matson:

<http://person.ancestry.co.uk/tree/65997026/person/42196699142/story> [consulted 13.12.15].

<sup>25</sup> Detailed in The National Archive [hereafter TNA], PROB 11/779/271, Will of Charles Matson, Yeoman of Wingham, Kent, 15 May 1750.

this implies, they were a substantial and wealthy family on a rising social curve. When Charles Matson senior died in 1749, his will described him as 'yeoman'; his son, the Charles mentioned above, was described as 'Gentleman' when he died in 1832.<sup>26</sup> Charles senior's widow, the redoubtable Judith Matson, meanwhile, was on sufficiently good terms with the leading families in the area to witness the will of Frances Palmer, a member of the family of Sir Thomas Palmer who had owned Wingham House before the Cosnans.<sup>27</sup> Mrs Matson regularly appeared alongside the gentry and clergy as a subscriber to volumes such as a new guide book to Kent, suggesting that the family felt a need to patronize - and be seen to patronize - such activities.<sup>28</sup> The eldest Matson son, John, ended his career as Judge Advocate of Dominica, and earned a two-page obituary in the *Gentleman's Magazine* at his death in 1805.<sup>29</sup> Charles junior, the cricketer, served as both a churchwarden and overseer of the poor at Wingham.

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<sup>26</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, 59 (1785), p.266; TNA, PROB 11/1136/270, Will of Judith Matson, Widow of Wingham, Kent, 1785; TNA, PROB 11/1800/117, Will of Charles Matson, Gentleman of Wingham, Kent May 1832

<sup>27</sup> TNA, PROB 11/960/66, Will of Frances Palmer, Spinster of Wingham, Kent (1770)

<sup>28</sup> Canterbury Cathedral Archive (hereafter CCA) CCA-DCb-E/F/Wingham, St Mary the Virgin/5, Matson Vault, 1749-50; *The Poll for the Knights of the Shire ...* (London, 1754); Charles Seymour, *A New Topographical, Historical, and Commercial Survey of the Cities, Towns, and Villages of ... Kent* (Canterbury 1776), p. 821.

<sup>29</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1805, pp. 1193-4: obituary of John Matson.

Alongside the Matsons stood the Rigden family.<sup>30</sup> George Rigden, was a tenant of Earl Cowper listed as occupying the second largest holding in Wingham, assessed at £159 in 1780; however, like the Matsons he held property of his own elsewhere. He was referred to as 'gent' in a legal document dated 1788, but simply as 'yeoman' in another dated 1789, suggesting a certain fluidity of social definition among this rank of society in late 18<sup>th</sup> century England.<sup>31</sup> Hasted, the great Kentish antiquarian, records that he acquired the lease of the parsonage in the parish of Milton from the Dean and Chapter at Canterbury, and he may have resided there.<sup>32</sup> Rigden's will suggests a connection with the Matson family, as he made provision for his son's eldest child, a boy called John Matson Rigden.<sup>33</sup> By the 1830s, John Matson Rigden was a leading corn factor and maltster in Wingham.<sup>34</sup> The use of the Matson name can hardly have been accidental, though it has not been possible to trace a precise connection between the families. Rigden served as an Overseer of the Poor in 1786, and undertook a two-year term as churchwarden in 1787-8.

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<sup>30</sup> They were also connected with the Hawks: for a notice of a union between a 'Miss Matson' of Wingham and 'Mr J[ohn] Hawkes of Dean Farm', *Monthly Magazine*, 12, (1801) p. 568. The Hawks in turn were connected with two other families among the parish elite, including the Austens and the Holnesses: *Colburn's New Monthly Magazine* (Vol. 6, 1822), p. 430; Will of William Hawks, Gentleman

<sup>31</sup> CCA-DCc-BB/79/158-61; CCA-DCc-BB/79/163, Lease, 1789; French, 'Social status', pp. 86-8.

<sup>32</sup> This would explain his relatively infrequent appearances at the Wingham parish vestry.

<sup>33</sup> TNA, PROB 11/1232/238-284: will of George Rigden, 1793.

<sup>34</sup> *The Jurist*, 6 (1842), p. 80.

A third important farming dynasty in the parish was formed by the East family. In 1780, William East appeared as both an owner and an occupier, having property assessed at £11 in his own name as well as tenancies valued at £98. As with other farmers in the parish, he held parcels of land from more than one landowner – a large block from the Oxendens and a smaller block from Sir Brooke Bridges, who resided in neighbouring Goodnestone. In 1789, the Easts acquired further property of their own, purchasing the house and demesne lands that had once formed a major part of the historic manor of Great Walmestone.<sup>35</sup> Despite this, the family appear to have had few pretensions to social distinction: when William East senior died in 1797 his will described him as ‘yeoman’, and an obituary notice in the *Gentleman’s Magazine* referred to him as simply ‘Mr William East’.<sup>36</sup> Both he and his son John appeared regularly as office-holders in the vestry, and the latter was a keen cricketer.

Alongside the elite of farmers, the vestry also relied on the efforts of leading tradesmen and artisans from the village. One of the most important was John Holness, a victualler, who attended nearly every Easter vestry between 1750 and 1790. Born in 1724, he served as overseer in 1765, and was a churchwarden 1773-4. He was prosperous, leaving various pieces of property in Sandwich and nearly £1000 in stocks at his death in 1807.<sup>37</sup> William Sharp,

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<sup>35</sup> Edward Hasted, *The History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent* (Canterbury, 1800), 9, p. 233.

<sup>36</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, 82 (1797), p. 715

<sup>37</sup> TNA, PROB 11/1467/83, Will of John Holness, Victualler of Wingham, Kent

another victualler, served as an overseer in 1778 and 1784, and did an atypical one-year stint as a churchwarden in 1783. He died in 1818, and his will revealed that he owned various small parcels of land as well as a sum of money invested in stocks.<sup>38</sup> He married a woman named Lydia Powell and one of the witnesses to his will was James Powell, who may well have been a younger brother. Powell himself was also a regular signatory of the vestry minutes and served as an Overseer of the Poor in 1781 and 1789. He was an important figure in the cricket team in 1773 and was recorded in the Militia List that year as a carpenter. He died in 1833, and his short will, though it describes him as a 'gentleman', does not suggest any great level of wealth.<sup>39</sup>

As these examples suggest, the senior offices in the vestry were served by both farmers and villagers.<sup>40</sup> The Wingham vestry books suggest that all began their careers in parish administration with a term as an overseer before moving on to the higher status role of churchwarden.<sup>41</sup> Thus the farmer, William East, sr, was as an overseer in 1762 and 1763, and then served a two-year term as a churchwarden 1768-9; his son, John, served as an overseer in 1778 and churchwarden in 1783 and 1784; Charles Matson followed suit, beginning his long career in parish administration with a spell as overseer in 1777 and a two-

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<sup>38</sup> TNA, PROB 11/1608/116, Will of William Sharp, Victualler of Wingham, Kent.

<sup>39</sup> TNA, PROB 11/1816/190. He simply bequeathed his household goods and money in equal portions to his sisters and a third individual.

<sup>40</sup> Gwyneth Nair, *Highley: The Development of a Community, 1550-1880* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 128-9. Arthur Hussey, *Chronicles of Wingham* (Canterbury, 1896) for printed lists of the officeholders.

year stint as churchwarden in 1778-9. John Holness, the victualler, served as overseer in 1765, and was a churchwarden 1773-4, while grocer and tallow-chandler William Port was an overseer in 1773 and churchwarden 1775-6.<sup>42</sup> Not everyone moved on to fill both posts, however. Caleb Palmer, a butcher, served a term as overseer in 1780, but never rose higher, while the carpenter, James Powell, was made to serve a long apprenticeship for the higher office. He took two turns as Overseer (1782 and 1792-3) before serving as churchwarden for a unique three-year spell (1799-1801) fully 20 years after he had first become a regular signatory of the vestry minutes. He served as overseer again in 1803, and churchwarden again 1806-1807.

This suggests that the churchwarden's role was seen as the senior position in Wingham.<sup>43</sup> Although the budget administered by the office holders was relatively small (in the year ending at Easter 1773, for example, Richard Premble and John Holness, spent just £18 11s 8d), they represented the parish in its dealings with the Diocese. It was they, for example, who attended Visitations, and they who were required to ensure that the requisite elements were in place for the conduct of divine service: that the church itself was clean and the nave in repair, that the clock worked and that the bells were rung. They also played a potentially sensitive social role, overseeing the morals of their fellow parishioners. Across the eighteenth century a succession of Wingham people were obliged to perform penances after the churchwardens presented them for

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<sup>42</sup> TNA, PROB 11/1062/54, Will of William Port, Grocer and Tallow Chandler of Wingham, Kent.

<sup>43</sup> Pitman, 'Tradition and exclusion', p. 34; Mutch, 'Custom and personal accountability', pp.74-6.

breaches such as ‘carnal knowledge before marriage’ (John and Ann Bissaker, 1722)<sup>44</sup>, ante-nuptial fornication (William Tatnall and Mary, his wife, 1724)<sup>45</sup>, or fornication, adultery and whoredom (Edward Ashley, 1750).<sup>46</sup> The churchwardens would also have been responsible for prosecuting those who refused to pay the church rates.<sup>47</sup>

In Wingham, churchwardens held the office for two consecutive years; overseers of the poor, by contrast, held their position for just one. Whatever the responsibilities of the former role, the latter was surely more taxing. The scale of the budget and the sheer number of transactions conducted by the overseers dwarfed what was expected of churchwardens. In 1773-4, for example, when William East and Thomas Parkes served the office, they dispersed £304 18s 0¼d.<sup>48</sup> A considerable sum, £139, was expended on weekly allowances for some 30 parishioners, and another £34 on the annual rents for 16 individuals, many of whom were widows. The remainder was disbursed in a long series of over 300 ‘Extraordinaries’. They discharged a succession of bills for necessities like bread, clothes, shoes, and coal; other payments were made for parishioners to sit with neighbours during periods of illness, to carry bodies to ‘the Ground’, to buy coffins, or to ‘ring Knells’. Beyond this, there were payments for attendance at

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<sup>44</sup> CCA-DCb-J/P/A/109

<sup>45</sup> CCA-DCb-J/P/A/130

<sup>46</sup> CCA-DCb-J/P/A/246

<sup>47</sup> CCA-DCb-PRC/18/43/161, Archdeaconry Court Records, 26 July 1711: churchwardens of Wingham v Thomas Winter, Elizabeth Denn, *et alia*, all of Wingham, for non-payment of cess.

<sup>48</sup> CCA U3/269/12/A1A, Overseers Account Book, Wingham, unpaginated.

meetings and for the costs of warrants, affidavits and oaths, or for simple handouts. The large number of 'extraordinaries' is an indication of the many faces that poverty wore in an eighteenth-century community – and how suddenly it might descend.

The cost of poor relief spiralled in the closing decades of the eighteenth century. Wingham, unlike other parishes, did not appoint a formal 'select vestry' in its attempts to control rising expenditure.<sup>49</sup> However, it is striking that several of the leading farmers, including Charles Matson, served multiple terms as overseer in this period (1777, 1783-4, 1790) – presumably as part of an effort to keep costs under control.<sup>50</sup> The parish decided to build a workhouse under Gilbert's Act at some point between 1780 and 1800; by 1803, about 84% of all expenditure on relieving the poor took place within the workhouse.<sup>51</sup>

The vestry was thus the heart of community government, the place where a body of the principal inhabitants worked together year in, year out to run the parish in accordance with long-tested principles. If Sir George Oxenden, as

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<sup>49</sup> PP 1803-04 (175) Abstract ... relative to the expense and maintenance of the poor in England.", p. 200; PP 1776-7, Fourteenth Parliament of Great Britain: third session (31 October 1776 - 6 June 1777), *Report from the Committee appointed to inspect and consider the Returns made by the Overseers of the Poor*, p. 372. The cost of poor relief in Wingham doubled in the decade after 1773 and kept rising.

<sup>50</sup> French, 'Social Status', pp. 82-6.

<sup>51</sup> Edward Hasted, 'Parishes: Wingham', in *The History and Topographical Survey of Kent*, vol. 9 (Canterbury 1800), pp. 224-41.



befitted a paternalist landowner, occasionally attended the vestry in person, and also signed off the accounts of the overseers of the poor each year in his capacity as a Magistrate, by and large the parish elite ran their affairs without obvious oversight.<sup>52</sup> Those holding the principal offices tended to be the older, more experienced members of the community, and there appears to have been a clear understanding in operation regarding the seniority of the roles, and how an individual might progress through the ranks to become an office holder. An examination of the Wingham vestry books shows sons following fathers into the vestry and duly graduating to take their turn first as Overseers, and then as churchwardens. Charles Matson, John East and James Powell all followed this route during the 1780s, for example. In 1773, however, still in their early twenties, they had other preoccupations. It is now time to turn to cricket, and the experiences of the Wingham Club.

## **II The Wingham Club**

Cricket, as noted in the introduction, enjoyed wide popularity across south-east England by the third-quarter of the eighteenth-century.<sup>53</sup> The patronage of the aristocracy is held by historians of the game to have been crucial in fuelling its spread and facilitating the emergence of standardized rules after 1743. It certainly lent the game a degree of glamour and ensured that newspapers noticed the so-called 'great matches' even in parts of the country where cricket

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<sup>52</sup> CCA/U3/269/5/A2: Oxenden was present on 16 April 1750 and 22 April 1752.

<sup>53</sup> John Bale, 'Cricket in pre-Victorian England and Wales', *Area*, 13, 2 (1981) pp. 119-22: he estimated 159 clubs in pre-Victorian Kent, 109 in Sussex, 86 in Hampshire and 86 in Essex.

was not yet widely played.<sup>54</sup> These fixtures, featuring professional players, were a regular feature in the Kentish sporting firmament by this time. Sir Horace Mann at Bourne and Lord John Sackville, third Duke of Dorset at Knole regularly brought together teams to compete for 'Kent' against equivalent sides representing Hampshire, Surrey, Sussex, and even, on occasion, 'All England', during the summer months.<sup>55</sup> Huge sums of prize money were at stake – 1000 Guineas was a not a-typical purse<sup>56</sup> – and gambling on the outcome of a match was rife, not least among the thousands of spectators who turned out to witness the games.

The archetypal 'great-match' team, however, hailed not from Kent but from the Hampshire village of Hambledon. Despite their rustic origins, Hambledon was hardly a typical 'village' eleven, and nor did they see themselves as such.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, in 1785, following a defeat at the hands of a team from

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<sup>54</sup> Brookes, *English Cricket*, p. 45.

<sup>55</sup> Birley, *Social History*, p. 36.

<sup>56</sup> The *Kentish Gazette* recorded various large wagers during the 1770s: 1000 guineas for the game between the Duke of Dorset's Kent XI and Hampshire (20 June 1778); 500 Guineas between Kent and Surrey (14 August 1773) for '500 guineas a side' between, firstly, Kent and Surrey (14 July 1779) and, next, Hampshire with two men given and All England (28 August 1779); and a massive 2000 guineas for the contest between Kent (led by Dorset) and Surrey (led by Lord Tankerville) in 1773, the year of Wingham's exploits (14 July 1773).

<sup>57</sup> Hambledon's cricketers first came to public attention in 1764 when they played a game against the 'Gentlemen of Chertsey' (*London Evening Post*, 13 September, 1764) and were referred to as Squire Lamb's club. David Underdown (*Start of Play*, p. 109) has suggested that this was actually a misprint, and that it was the Land family to whom reference was being made. However, "Squire Lamb" was sometimes used in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to denote a fictitious, thoroughly rural squire of the old Tory school, and it may be that the club adopted this name as a play on their rural roots:

Farnham, the Revd Charles Powlett was overheard fulminating about the indignity of being beaten by 'a mere parish side'.<sup>58</sup> Hambledon was much more than this. While many village teams enjoyed the patronage of a local squire, Hambledon's membership list boasted 18 titled noblemen, 2 knights, 27 officers from the army and navy and 6 MPs. Powlett himself was the 3<sup>rd</sup> son of the Duke of Bolton. By no means all these individuals wished to play cricket themselves, joining simply to enjoy the social aspects of club life.<sup>59</sup> Yet it was their subscriptions that enabled the club to employ paid professionals from Hampshire and beyond to contest the teams pieced together by the likes of Sir Horace Mann and the Duke of Dorset. Hambledon was thus no 'mere parish side': the club competed regularly and fielded highly skilled cricketers who were used to performing before very large crowds, often for huge prize money - and winning.<sup>60</sup>

The interest and sense of local patriotism generated by the exploits of the Hambledon Club is well attested, and it seems likely that the 'great' games helped fuel the growth of formally organized cricket clubs across the south-east after

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Mary Jane Holmes, *Madeleine: a Novel* (London, 1881), p. 27; 'Labourers' Prizes', first published in the *Globe*, reproduced by *The Examiner*, 26 October 1844.

<sup>58</sup> Underdown, *Start of Play*, p. 127.

<sup>59</sup> Underdown, *Start of Play*, pp. 128-9, for the dining culture.

<sup>60</sup> Underdown, *Start of Play*, pp. 114-23, 127-33. Hambledon competed for total stake money of £32,527, 1770-90, winning £22,497: Light, 'Cricket in the Eighteenth century', p. 33.

1750.<sup>61</sup> Hitherto, cricket at the level below that patronised by the aristocracy had taken the form of challenge matches in which ‘eleven gentleman’ of one place took on ‘eleven gentlemen’ of another.<sup>62</sup> A club, however, implied something more formal. Clubs were, as Peter Clark has written, among the ‘most distinctive social and cultural institutions of Georgian Britain’,<sup>63</sup> though little attention has been paid to sporting clubs.<sup>64</sup> The surviving records of the Hambledon Club, together with the few fragmentary remains of more the few fragmentary constitutions from this period all point to the same conclusion: membership required commitment. Members were expected not only to pay an entrance fee and an annual subscription but also to practise and to socialize, on pain of a fine.<sup>65</sup> It is impossible to know how universally these conditions applied, but the increasing number of clubs appearing in the columns of the *Kentish Gazette* alongside gentlemanly elevens in the 1760s and 1770s suggests a new level of

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<sup>61</sup> John Nyren, *Nyren’s Cricketer’s Guide*, (London, 1888), pp. 43-91; Light, ‘Cricket’s Forgotten Past’, p. 117.

<sup>62</sup> Light, ‘Cricket’s Forgotten Past’, p. 115.

<sup>63</sup> Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*, p. 2.

<sup>64</sup> An exception is Stefan Szymanski, ‘A theory of the evolution of modern sport’, International Association of Sports Economists, Working Paper Series, Paper No. 06-30 (November 2006), p. 34. For the debate on his views: the contributions in *Journal of Sport History*, 35 (2008) pp. 1-64; Wray Vamplew, ‘Theories and typologies: a historical exploration of the sports club in Britain’, *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 30 (2014), pp. 1569-85; Roy Hay, ‘A tale of two footballs: the origins of Australian football and association football revisited’, *Sport in Society: Cultures, Commerce, Media, Politics*, 13 (2010), pp. 952-969

<sup>65</sup> Underdown, *Start of Play*, pp. 126-7; Light, ‘Cricket’s Forgotten Past’, pp. 124-5.

organization in the game.<sup>66</sup> One of these was the Wingham Club, and it is to their activities that this section is devoted.

The principal source for recovering the history of the Wingham Club is a series of seven scorecards from games played during the summer of 1773. Five were published by the Canterbury-based newspaper, the *Kentish Gazette*; two others were reprinted from an unknown newspaper by W. T. Waghorn in his collection of eighteenth-century cricket documents.<sup>67</sup> We know that the club played an eighth fixture, but the scorecard has not survived.<sup>68</sup> As a source, the scorecards present a particular challenge because they identified each batsman by his surname alone; as a consequence identifying with absolute precision which of several brothers (for example) might have been playing cricket for the village is sometimes problematic. By reading the scorecards alongside a range of contemporary records, however, we can establish with reasonable accuracy the identity of most individuals who played for Wingham in 1773. In what follows they are divided into three categories, depending on the number of games they

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<sup>66</sup> *KG*, 3 August 1768 and 21 August 1773 (Leeds); 12 September 1772 (Dartford); 10 July 1773 (Chatham); 28 August 1773 (New Romney); 15 June 1774 (Strood)

<sup>67</sup> H. T. Waghorn, *Cricket Scores, Notes &c from 1730-1773* (Edinburgh, 1899).

<sup>68</sup> The missing game was a match against Nonnington which Wingham won: *KG*, 10 July 1773. No evidence has been found to suggest Wingham played more than these 8 matches in 1773. The club itself almost certainly paid for the scorecards to be inserted in the *Gazette*, although why is not clear: *KG*, 6 July 1774; Frank Panton, *Canterbury's Tycoon: James Simmons – Reshaper of his city* (Canterbury, 1990).

played. No details of bowling or fielding accomplishments were included in the scorecards, thus we have only a record of each player's batting performance.<sup>69</sup>

The most important group in the club was the core of seven committed players who not only played whenever they could, but presumably also participated in whatever activities - practice games, dinners, etc - it organised. Prominent among these were two key figures – Charles Matson the younger and John East. Both men were in their early 20s in 1773 and were the sons of leading farmers in the parish – stalwarts of the middling sort. Matson, born in 1750, played in 7 games, completing 14 innings with an average of 21.9. He was the mainstay of the Wingham batting, twice making scores in excess of 30.<sup>70</sup> He was clearly a highly 'sporty' individual, as contemporary sources record his participation in a range of events beyond cricket, including pedestrianism and coursing. In 1776 he was taken to court by Sir George Oxenden on suspicion of

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<sup>69</sup> Keith A. P. Sandiford, 'Amateurs and Professionals in Victorian County Cricket', *Albion*, 15 (1983), p. 33, remarks that in the Victorian era, more physically strenuous activities like bowling were delegated to men of the lower class, batting being seen as a suitably gentlemanly pastime. The absence of bowling and fielding information from the scorecards makes it impossible to test whether the more socially elevated members of the village team eschewed the more laborious aspects of the game; however, when Wingham took the field for what appears to have been a one-off game in 1775, the team's most prominent player, John Matson, led both the batting and the bowling, suggesting that such considerations were not important in this instance: *KG*, 12 July 1775.

<sup>70</sup> That this represented a good score can be gleaned from the fact that at Hambledon, members participating in the club's Tuesday 'practice matches' were obliged to retire on reaching 30: Underdown, *Start of Play*, p.129.

poaching when he and his greyhound were discovered on Dene estate land – though he was acquitted.<sup>71</sup> Interestingly, the very next Easter marked the first occasion on which he signed the Easter vestry minutes, perhaps suggesting that the court case represented something of a watershed for Charles Matson – a signal to put behind him childish things. By 1780 he had acquired a holding worth £63 a year, and was already embarked on a busy career of parish service that saw him serve as an overseer of the poor in 1777, 1783-1784, 1790 and 1808, and churchwarden, 1778-9, 1796-7, 1808-1809 and 1816-17. Less is known about John East. Like Matson, he was born in 1750, played 7 games and completed 13 innings at an average of just 5.1. He began attending the vestry in 1782, served as overseer in 1785 and then stepped up for a two-year term as churchwarden in 1789-90.

Matson and East represented the farming interest. Several other regular players were drawn from the ranks of the village tradesmen. Foremost among these was James Powell. Born in 1749, he played in every game and competed 13 innings at an average of 12.9. He was described in the 1773 Militia list as a carpenter, but he may have been connected with the Powell dynasty that ran various public houses in the village, including the Dog, the Red Lion and the Blue Anchor.<sup>72</sup> At all events, James Powell seems to have been very well connected: a regular attender at the parish vestry, he also turns up as a witness on a number of Wingham wills, several for members of families that provided members for

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<sup>71</sup> *KG*, 3 August 1776.

<sup>72</sup> KRO, PS/W/m/5 [U891 01]: unpaginated: ie. 1760

the team, including both the Elgars and the Nevilles (below). He was a renowned athlete in his own right: the *Kentish Gazette* reported an occasion in 1783 when 'Mr Powel [sic] of Wingham, ran with Mr Cloake, of Heaton, a match for 40 guineas' which he won, as indeed he had the previous year.<sup>73</sup> Like Matson, he began attending the vestry later in the 1770s and was a regular signatory of the minutes thereafter. He served as an Overseer of the Poor in 1781 and 1789, but, as noted in the previous section, had to wait some time before being invited to fill the senior office of churchwarden, though he eventually did so in 1799-1801 and 1806-1807.

Another important villager was Henry Sandcraft, listed as a cordwainer in the 1773 Militia Return, and as the occupier of property assessed at £4 in the Land Tax assessment of 1780. He played 6 games and averaged 8.9 from 9 innings. The Sandcrafts were an established Wingham family. A William Sandcraft voted the Oxenden party line at the election of 1734 and Henry was clearly an employer of labour, since in 1770 he advertised in the *Kentish Gazette* for two journeyman cordwainers.<sup>74</sup> Although he was never called upon to undertake a role in the vestry, he was the Bonsholder, the officer responsible for compiling the annual Militia List in the parish, during the mid 1780s.<sup>75</sup> He was among the signatories of the Easter vestry minutes in 1786 and 1788. In March 1786 he also presented the parish with a bill totalling £3 0s 7d for his work

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<sup>73</sup> *KG*, 2 July 1783.

<sup>74</sup> *KG*, 27 October 1770; *The Poll for Knights of the Shire ...* (London, 1734).

<sup>75</sup> CCA, Overseers accounts, 1785. Wingham Parish to Henry Sandcraft, 11 March 1786.



making and repairing shoes for paupers during the previous 12 month period, a reminder that local networks around the parish were multi-layered and reciprocal.<sup>76</sup>

Alongside these men were several other regular players of whom little is known: John Agar who completed 14 innings and averaged 14.1 across the season, was identified in the 1773 Militia List as a barber; no one with this surname served as either an overseer of the poor or a churchwarden 1750-1790. Thomas Wellard appears as a chair-maker in the same Militia return. He also completed 14 innings at an average of 11.4, and was listed in the Land Tax Assessment of 1780 as the owner of a property assessed at £2. He appears never to have attended the vestry or served a parish office. Finally, there was Ralph Mount listed in the Militia return as a carpenter. He played 6 games and completed 11 innings at an average of 14.3, but there is no record of his having undertaken any parish officership or attended the vestry. Of the regular players, the only one of whom we know nothing is Dunn, who completed 14 innings with an average of 17.7.

These eight players formed the heart of the Wingham Club, and clearly sought to play whenever they could. A second group played between three and five matches. Once again they contained a mixture of farmers, tradesmen and craftsmen from within Wingham and villages just beyond its borders, though a

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<sup>76</sup> CCA, U3/269/12B2, Box 256: 'Wingham Parish to H. Sandcraft', 17 March 1786. Some 45 individuals had new shoes made or existing items re-soled or re-heeled

higher degree of uncertainty surrounds the identification of these individuals than those in the preceding group.

The individual listed as Elgar is almost certainly a member of the prominent local farming family of that name. The Elgars succeeded the Matsons as tenants of Wingham Court farm on Judith Matson's death in 1785. John Elgar senior, described as a 'yeoman', was one of Judith Matson's executors,<sup>77</sup> while James Powell was one of the witnesses recorded in the wills of his sons John and Charles, suggesting a degree of intimacy between these three cricketing families. Charles was born in 1745 and so could well have been the cricketer; he died, aged about 50 in 1795, and in his own will James Powell appointed Stephen Elgar, whom he singled out as a 'friend' as an executor.<sup>78</sup> It has not been possible to trace Stephen with any certainty, but he may have been a younger brother of John and the individual who played cricket.<sup>79</sup> Whichever Elgar it was played four matches, averaging 8.3 across seven innings.

James How played four games, batted on six occasions and ended with an average of 4. He was born in 1752, and at this stage of his career was a butcher working with Henry and Caleb Palmer, the latter of whom served as an overseer

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<sup>77</sup> TNA, PROB 11/1136/270; will of Judith Matson; TNA, PROB 11/1642/20, Will of John Elgar, Gentleman of Wingham, Kent; *KG*, 15 June 1787.

<sup>78</sup> Charles Elgar is buried at St Mary the Virgin churchyard, Wingham; his chest tomb is Grade 2 listed; English Heritage Building ID: 178365.

<sup>79</sup> TNA, PROB 11/1816/190, Will of James Powell, Gentleman of Wingham, Kent; PROB 11/1266/563-608: will of Charles Elgar, 1795.

in 1780. He married in Wingham in 1780, and may have left the parish as he is not mentioned in that year's Land Tax Assessment. He died in the neighbouring parish of Goodnestone in 1829. The man listed as Castle, who played 3 games and amassed 5 runs, is probably William Castle, a member of an established family of Wingham tradesmen.<sup>80</sup> Leonard Miller, listed as a baker in the 1773 Militia list, played three games, amassing a total of 10 runs in five innings. He was born in 1751, and by the time of the 1780 Land Tax assessment occupied property valued at £5, which he rented from Judith Matson. He died at Wingham in 1825, aged 75. There is no record of any of these men in the vestry minutes.

Another difficult case involves Minter, who played 3 games and batted five times, ending the season with an average of 10. There are two viable options. He may have been Thomas Minter, recorded in the Militia list as Sir Henry Oxenden's butler; alternatively he could be William Minter, who seems to have arrived in Wingham around 1775. He married Sarah, whose father was another of Wingham's larger farmers, William Wraith, overseer of the poor in 1782. William Minter was born in 1754 in Ickham. His father Henry, was listed as occupying property valued at £182 in the 1772 Land Tax assessment for Ickham, suggesting that the Minters were – like the Matsons, Easts, Rigdens and Wraiths - substantial yeomen.<sup>81</sup> William had two older brothers, Henry b 1749 and John b 1752, either of whom might have been the cricketer. However, if William was in

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<sup>80</sup> KRO, L/MS/3/2, 'Wingham Persons balloted 19 September 1757'; TNA, PROB 11/919/194-239 (1766) Will of Richard Castle

<sup>81</sup> KRO, Q/CTL/96/11, Ickham Land Tax 1772.

the parish courting Sarah Wraith in 1773, and was of a similar age and social standing to John East and Charles Matson, he might well have joined in their cricketing. Since there are no other obvious links between the cricket team and the Oxenden household (none of the games was played at Dene, for example), we may assume that, for once, the butler probably did not do it, and that it was William Minter, the farmer's son, who turned out for the Wingham club.

The final group contains six individuals who played once or twice for Wingham in the summer of 1773. John Neame, who played two games, scoring 8 runs in 3 innings, was a yeoman from Littlebourne; in the 1776 Land Tax assessment for the parish he is recorded as holding property worth £79.<sup>82</sup> He was the husband of Sarah Rigden, whose father George was the second largest occupier of land in Wingham.<sup>83</sup> William Seath, who played both games against Hythe at the end of the season, averaging 7.5, was born in 1746; his father was John Seath of Wingham, assessed for 7 lights or windows in 1765-6, and he signed the vestry book with a mark in 1766. William held property worth £6 by 1780. John Tritton, listed as a farmer's son in the Militia List for the Dene borough of Wingham in 1764, was described as a yeoman when he married two years later. He played two games for Wingham and amassed 12 runs from his 3 innings. Henry Newton Neville, who played just one game of cricket for Wingham, was the son of Henry Nevil, an apothecary. He was born in 1754, and would thus have been 19 in 1773. The Militia list described him as a surgeon, so

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<sup>82</sup> KRO, Q/CTL/112/47, Littlebourne Land Tax, 1776

<sup>83</sup> TNA, PROB 11/1232/ 238-284 (1793), will of George Rigden.

he clearly followed in the footsteps of his father. The latter's death, at the age of 89 in 1808, was noted in the columns of the *Gentleman's Magazine*; one of the witnesses to his will was the ubiquitous James Powell, again providing a link to the cricketing fraternity.<sup>84</sup>

Of the last two players who turned out for Wingham in 1773, very little is known. For the player named as Denne, who played twice and averaged 11.5 from 4 innings, there are several candidates. He might have been a resident of the parish, in which case he was probably either Thomas, a wealthy tailor,<sup>85</sup> or Henry, a blacksmith;<sup>86</sup> either, or both, could have been sons of Richard Denne of Wingham (1699-1775), described in several leases of the 1730s and 40s as 'gentleman'.<sup>87</sup> Alternatively, the Wingham Club may simply have borrowed a member of the Denne farming dynasty which dominated the parish of Littlebourne, and one of whose members turned out against Wingham when the Club visited the parish in 1773. Finally, the only man to be allowed the dignity of an initial in any of the scorecards, is also the only man of whom no trace can be found. 'R. Simmons' played one game in the middle of the season and might have been a relation of a surgeon, Samuel Foart Simmons.<sup>88</sup> Unfortunately a search of all records relating to Simmons gives no clue as to who this individual might be.

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<sup>84</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, 78 (1808), p. 748; TNA, PROB 11/1478/167, Will of Henry Neville, Surgeon of Wingham, Kent.

<sup>85</sup> TNA, PROB 11/1647/267.

<sup>86</sup> 'Gentleman' in his will, 1819: THA, PROB 11/1615/153-198.

<sup>87</sup> KRO, CAN-U424/T10/3-4, leases, 25 Sept. 1730, 9 Nov. 1742.

<sup>88</sup> KG, 11 August 1770. He held a diploma from the Corporation of Surgeons

The members of the Wingham club thus belonged to the broad ‘middling’ group identified in section one – the farmers, tradesmen and craftsmen of the parish. Most seem to have been young, in their late teens or early twenties, and thus still occupying quite junior positions within their chosen fields; however, it is clear that they were not labourers or servants. Indeed, the labourers and servants, despite forming over 50% of those recorded in the 1773 Militia list for Wingham, and, by extension, of the broadly eligible cricketing population, are conspicuous by their absence from the history of the club.

A similar picture emerges if we focus on the matches the club played during the summer of 1773.<sup>89</sup> Wingham played two games each (once at home, once away) against four different local teams during the season. The club’s season began with two games in June against a team of ‘gentlemen’ drawn from a group of villages 10 miles south of Wingham, including Swingfield, Alckham and Denton.<sup>90</sup> On both occasions Wingham proved too good for their opponents, winning the first game by 26 runs and the return, which we know was held in Sir William Lynch’s pasture on Monday 24 June, by 7 wickets.<sup>91</sup> The fixture

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<sup>89</sup> In all parishes outside Wingham, information regarding surveyors of highways, overseers of the poor, assessors and collectors of Land Tax, and constables comes from the unpaginated Magistrates book of the Wingham division: KRO, PS/W/m/5 [U891 01]

<sup>90</sup> *KG*, 19 June 1773; Waghorn, *Cricket Scores*,

<sup>91</sup> A note on cricket results: (a) a victory by a margin of ‘x runs’, means that the aggregate number of runs amassed by one team in two completed innings was x runs more than the total achieved by their opponents: the victors are thus said to have won by that number of runs; (b)

probably came about through a Matson family connection since the 1780 Land Tax return for Swingfield lists a 'Mr Matson' as occupying the most valuable holding in the parish (£109). Two Matsons, with the initials 'T' and 'R' played against Wingham – presumably the sons of Mr Matson. A Robert Matson was born in 1746 in the parish, and in 1781 is recorded as having married Elizabeth Pilcher. The Pilchers farmed in Denton, and two members of the family, Thomas and Stephen, played in the games against Wingham. Stephen was listed as the occupier of the most valuable property in the parish in the 1772 Land Tax assessment, and regularly served as an overseer of the poor and Surveyor Of Highways; he was in all likelihood a churchwarden too.<sup>92</sup> Although it has not been possible to trace other individuals with the same degree of certainty, it seems clear that Wingham's first opponents in 1773 were lead by members of the middling sort.

The Club next played a pair of fixtures in July against Nonnington, a village some 5 miles south of Wingham. The *Kentish Gazette* reported that Wingham won the first fixture, held on a Wednesday, by the margin of 41 runs,

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victory by 'x wickets': this implies that the winning side were able to overhaul the aggregate score achieved by their opponents during their two completed innings without needing to complete their second innings: victory by a margin of six wickets implies that the losing team had still to dismiss six of the winning team's batsmen when their total was surpassed; (c) in a very one-sided match, the winning team might amass more runs from a single innings than their opponents managed in both of theirs: this outcome is summarized as victory 'by an innings and x runs'.

<sup>92</sup> KRO, Q/CTL/55/69, Denton Land Tax 1772.

but did not produce a scorecard.<sup>93</sup> For the return match, played the following Monday in Lynch's pasture 'before a great Number of Spectators', a scorecard did appear. Despite the fact that Nonnington were strengthened by 'one picked man', Wingham proved much too good for their visitors and won by 82 runs.<sup>94</sup>

Once again, Wingham's opponents were dominated by members of the middling sort, and once again the most prominent name is Matson who in this case opened the batting. Although the family appears to have divested itself of property in the parish by the early 1770s, they were associated with Ratling Court; throughout the 1760s, Robert Matson was prominent in local administration, serving as an overseer of Highways (four times) and an Overseer of the Poor (twice). He was also one of the two appointed assessors and collectors of Land Tax in the parish from 1760-68. Had the vestry minutes survived, he would undoubtedly also have been listed as a churchwarden. Another prominent figure was Stephen Payne who occupied land rated at £103 in 1774 and owned land rated at £10.<sup>95</sup> He served as a surveyor of highways and an overseer of the poor in 1766, and took over from Matson as assessor and collector of the Land Tax for the parish in 1769. His co-assessor and collector was his father in law, he having married Jane Ashenden in 1766. Another who played was Thomas Gambrill occupier of property valued at £40, owner of a

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<sup>93</sup> *KG*, 10 July 1773.

<sup>94</sup> *KG*, 14 July 1773, the report of the game remarked that 'six of the Club men knocked up their Wickets the left hand', meaning, perhaps that they batted left handed to give the opposition a chance.

<sup>95</sup> KRO, Q/CTL/137/70, Nonnington Land Tax 1774.



property worth £1, and an individual who served as both a surveyor of highways and overseer of the poor.<sup>96</sup>

Whether the matches against either of these opponents involved a money stake is not clear from the newspaper coverage. The presence of a large number of spectators at the second Nonnington match strongly suggests that a good deal of gambling would have taken place around the margins of the game. The Wingham Club's next fixture, however, against 'eleven gentlemen' from a cluster of villages centred on Littlebourne, three miles west of Wingham, certainly did. The *Kentish Gazette* advertised that the match was to be played for half a Guinea a man - a not insubstantial sum when an agricultural labourer might earn 1s 6d a day.<sup>97</sup> Half a guinea a man appears to have been a standard wager for teams like the Wingham Club in Kent at this time; the *Kentish Gazette* reported several other games between local village teams played for similar sums.<sup>98</sup> Wingham won both games. In the first match, in Sir William Lynch's pasture on a Friday, they triumphed by the margin of 45 runs; in the second, held in Mr Southee's pasture at Littlebourne, they won by 4 wickets.

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<sup>96</sup> KRO, Q/CTL/137/39, Frogham Borough (Nonington) Land Tax 1772.

<sup>97</sup> *KG*, 14 July 1773; the other villages mentioned were including Ickham, Bridge, Patribourn and Breakbourn; Boys, *General View*, p. 41.

<sup>98</sup> E.g., *KG*, 16 July 1774, 'The Gentlemen of Wye, Godmersham and Chilham against the Gentlemen of Faversham, for Half a Guinea each man'; *KG*, 21 July 1781, Gentlemen of Ashford v Gentlemen of Faversham to be played at Ashford, 1Guinea a man.

Once again, members of the middling sort were prominent. Perhaps the keys to this fixture were two young men who married into prosperous Wingham families, and occasionally played for the Wingham club in their own right. The first was John Neame who, as already noted, played two games for Wingham and was married to a daughter of George Rigden. The second was William Minter of Ickham who would marry the daughter of William Wraith in 1775. Of the other players, Thomas (b.1748) and William (b.1753) Southee were the sons of John Southee. John Southee occupied £64-worth of land in Littlebourne at the time of the land tax return of 1776, and was described as 'yeoman' in a mortgage document signed in 1769.<sup>99</sup> He was one of the Constables for Wingham Hundred in 1764, signing the Militia list in that year, and one leg of this cricket match is recorded as having been played in his meadow in Littlebourne.<sup>100</sup> Edward Andrews (b 1747) was the son of John Andrews of Patrixbourne, who occupied land worth £36 and was thus almost certainly a farmer.<sup>101</sup> The player named Denne, meanwhile, might have been one of several individuals belonging to the most extensive family of occupiers in Littlebourne.<sup>102</sup> The largest holding in the parish in 1776 belonged to Hy Denne (£142); Thomas Denne owned property worth £4 and occupied property worth £13; John Denne occupied property worth £33. Henry and Thomas regularly undertook duty as Surveyors of Highways and Overseers of the poor in the 1750s and 1760s. Had the vestry

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<sup>99</sup> KRO, Q/CTL/112/47, Littlebourne Land Tax 1776; Museum of English Rural Life, KEN 6/6/101, 1769 July 29, Assignment of mortgage for 500 years.

<sup>100</sup> *KG*, 21 July 1773.

<sup>101</sup> KRO, Q/CTL/96/10 Patrixbourne Land Tax 1774.

<sup>102</sup> KRO, Q/CTL/112/47, Littlebourne Land Tax 1776

books survived it is likely that we would find they had also been churchwardens. Any one of these could have been the cricketer. Thomas Kingsmill (b 1743), meanwhile, was a carpenter from Ickham.<sup>103</sup>

Much less is known about the games against the season's final opponents, 'the cricketers of Hythe and Elham', strengthened by 'one pick'd man'. Whether or not any money was at stake is, once again, lost to history, and the names of many of the players recorded in the scorecard that appeared in the *Kentish Gazette* are unfortunately illegible. Hythe lies some 20 miles south of Wingham, in a different administrative district, and so the entries in the Magistrates' Book for the Wingham Division do not cover these areas. However, although we cannot say much about the players, we can note the results. As usual, there were games in both locations. In the first contest, played on Monday 2 August in Hythe, Wingham won by 5 wickets; however, in the return match, played the following Monday in Col. Cosnan's pasture, Wingham suffered an unexpected reverse, going down to defeat by 10 wickets. It was the only blemish on an otherwise perfect summer for the Wingham Club.

### **Section III: Conclusion: the middling sort and cricket**

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<sup>103</sup> Kingsmill may have been the brother in law of Wingham farmer John Tritton. Apprenticeship indenture: UK, Register of Duties Paid for Apprentices' Indentures, 1710-1811; marriage: it2 DCB/BTI/127 p153

For the young men of Wingham, forming a cricket club and issuing challenges to acquaintances in neighbouring parishes undoubtedly represented the innocent pursuit of a summer's pleasure. Yet their activities shed an interesting light not just on village cricket - a level of the game about which we know very little - but also on the wider social and cultural context in which the game was played. In this section, attention turns to the place of cricket in the world of the middling sort.

The members of the late eighteenth-century cricketing community centred on Wingham seem to have shared a series of social and economic characteristics that marked them out from their neighbours. To be sure, there was a reasonable material distance between prosperous farmers like the Matsons and the small-scale artisans of the village, men like Wellard, the chair-maker: as Henry French has cautioned, the term 'middling sort' may be as much a historical convenience as a description of social reality.<sup>104</sup> And yet the things that set these individuals apart from those above and below them in the social scale seem ultimately more important than the differences between them.

One indication of how important the players felt their shared identity to be was their decision to found a club in the first place. Eighteenth-century clubs

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<sup>104</sup> French, 'Social status', p. 100. Frustratingly, the surviving sources don't offer sufficient descriptive detail to allow for a more granular analysis of the relative social standing of the men identified here along the lines of that conducted by Henry French for parishes in Lancashire and Essex: French, 'Social Status', pp. 66-99.

did more than draw together people with common interests: increasingly they restricted their membership to those of similar social background. Whilst seventeenth-century fraternal bodies had drawn together people from varied social backgrounds, their eighteenth-century successors appealed, in Karen Harvey's words, to 'a varied but narrower middling-sort group of men' – a description which fits well the array of individuals playing cricket for Wingham.<sup>105</sup>

The common outlook of the club's members was reinforced by their individual access to the resources necessary to pursue their hobby. Cricket was a time-intensive and reasonably expensive pastime: those who sought to play regularly had to have sufficient reserves of both. As Dennis Brailsford has demonstrated, sport was rarely if ever a weekend pastime in this period; instead, games were played on days when many people, certainly those engaged as labourers or servants, would have been expected to be at their work.<sup>106</sup> Masters, it is true, occasionally gave those in their employ permission to attend a game of cricket, and the fact that a large crowd was able to gather in Wingham on a Monday in June to watch the club take on neighbouring Nonnington suggests that a degree of flexibility existed for others on occasion.<sup>107</sup> Indeed, in a village

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<sup>105</sup> Karen Harvey, 'Ritual encounters: punch parties and masculinity in the eighteenth century', *Past & Present*, 214 (2012), p. 172. Davies and Light, *Cricket and Community*, p. 23.

<sup>106</sup> Dennis Brailsford, 'Sporting days in eighteenth century England', *Journal of Sport History*, 9 (1982), pp. 51-2; cf Emma Griffin, *England's Revelry*, p. 48.

<sup>107</sup> Robert W Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations in English Society, 1700-1850* (Cambridge, 1973), pp. 41-2.

boasting the array of trades found in Wingham, it may be that the tradition of St Monday – the informal holiday which those tasked with piece-work granted themselves in the pre-industrial period - flourished.<sup>108</sup> However, the core members of the Wingham club took at least 8 week-days off in order to play matches – and there may have been additional time required for practice. It is clear that these individuals had considerable autonomy over their own schedules. They also had sufficient money to be able to indulge in both the social aspects of the game – teams doubtless dined and socialised together after the match – and to put up the stake money when this was called for. Although we know of only one game involving Wingham in 1773 where a specific stake was mentioned, that sum – half a guinea – was not a trifle, and certainly placed cricket beyond the reach of the village's poorer inhabitants.

All the characteristics we have noted for the Wingham cricketers applied equally to those of their opponents it has been possible to identify, and here it is interesting to reflect on the invariable practice whereby teams were described as 'the gentlemen' of a particular parish or group of parishes. Henry French has demonstrated how universally members of parish elites in Essex and Lancashire adopted the highly portable social descriptor 'gentleman' in this period. On occasion they also used other terms to describe themselves, such as 'chief inhabitants of the parish', but the distinction to be gained from such a descriptor naturally ended at the bounds of the parish itself.<sup>109</sup> The term 'gentleman', by

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<sup>108</sup> Douglas A. Reid, 'The decline of St Monday, 1766-1876', *Past & Present*, 71 (1976), pp. 76-101.

<sup>109</sup> French, 'Social status', pp. 86-8, 93.

contrast, had a much wider currency, and it is surely significant that those who played against the Wingham Club all stepped forward as the 'gentlemen' of their respective parishes. The analysis of these teams conducted above strongly supports the contention that they were indeed led by precisely that group of leading occupiers which dominated the parish vestry. They were the upper echelons of the middling sort, the legitimate representatives of the parish beyond its boundaries. Their sense of collective identity – or at least collective differentiation from those less favourably circumstanced – was strong and was not confined simply to those within their own parishes.

If the cricketers who turned out for the Wingham Club or its opponents were defined by a sense of difference between themselves and those below them in the social order, it was also the case that they were highly conscious of those who sat above them. As Jonathan Barry and Henry French have both argued, the middling sort 'understood their status in the context of local hierarchies'.<sup>110</sup> Although the lower echelons of the community, especially those dependent on poor relief, might have seen the middling sort as 'parish rulers' (in the phrase coined by the Northamptonshire labourer-poet John Clare), they were keenly aware that their primacy operated within very specific constraints.<sup>111</sup> Whatever role the farmers played as the day-to-day arbiters of parish administration, they were ultimately tenants; it was the aristocratic owners of land who held the whip hand and were the parish's real 'rulers'. As a consequence, as noted earlier, the

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<sup>110</sup> French, 'Social status', pp. 99-100.

<sup>111</sup> Quoted in French, 'Social status', 73-4

middling sort of Wingham fell in behind their political masters at election time without demur.

This consciousness tempered whatever tendency might have existed towards that process whereby the middling sort, as Steve Hindle puts it, came to see themselves 'not merely as representatives of the parish community, but actually as the whole body of that community'.<sup>112</sup> In practice, the legitimacy of their claim to represent the parish was dependent on the person from whom they held their land, and in this context it is interesting to reflect on the large number of clubs founded after the mid-eighteenth century with gentry support. Cricket historians tend to present this as the gentry doing on a small scale what the aristocracy did more magnificently in their 'great matches' - drawing together teams to engage in competition.<sup>113</sup> There certainly are examples of this: in Kent, for example, Squire Farrar's Isle of Thanet team was active in the 1770s.<sup>114</sup> Yet it seems equally likely that in many cases the dynamic worked in quite another way, and that these were clubs founded by the middling sort - who certainly possessed sufficient leisure, organisational ability and extra-parochial networks to undertake such an enterprise - and then sought the patronage (and blessing) of the local landowner. The archives of landed estates overflow with requests for this kind of patronage, and as Gordon Mingay and others have

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<sup>112</sup> Hindle, 'Beating the bounds', p. 216.

<sup>113</sup> Brookes, *English Cricket*, p.47; Light, 'Cricket's Forgotten Past', pp. 120-22.

<sup>114</sup> Waghorn, *Cricket Scores*, pp. 84-6, 28 August and 7 September 1772, Isle of Thanet v Canterbury.



demonstrated, landowners regarded it as part of their paternalistic responsibility to the community to lend their backing to a range of activities.<sup>115</sup>

Interestingly, while the Wingham Club had no obvious patron, newspaper advertisements were at pains to specify that its matches would be played in a pasture belonging either to Sir William Lynch, a Tory MP who resided in the parish, or Colonel Cosnan. Given the acreages occupied by both the Matson and East families, it would be surprising if a suitable field could not have been found on their properties for club matches; indeed, when the club travelled to Littlebourne the match took place in a pasture belonging to a local farmer, Mr Southee. Yet in Wingham the aristocratic association seems to have been important, and legitimated the club's use of the parish name.

Cricket, it may be concluded, had the potential to offer the middling sort of Wingham and its neighbouring parishes a range of social opportunities and benefits, whether these were articulated consciously or not. At one level, it was an opportunity for display: it allowed them to exhibit the fact that they had the leisure to pursue their hobbies, untrammelled by the regular demands of work; that they had the public blessing and support of the local landowners to put themselves forward as the legitimate representatives of the parish; and that they were part of a wider network of other 'gentlemen' who also dominated the administration of their own parishes and enjoyed the privileges of their

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<sup>115</sup> G MIngay, *English Landed Society in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1965), pp. 131-64.

position.<sup>116</sup> Cricket, however, was also about creating and strengthening social networks. We know from fragmentary sources such as the early eighteenth-century diary of a Sussex farmer, Thomas Marchant, that cricket matches brought neighbours and acquaintances together and allowed pieces of business to be done.<sup>117</sup> Equally, as the experience of several individuals testifies - John Neame of Littlebourne and William Minter of Ickham, who both married Wingham girls, or Robert Matson of Swingfield, who married a sister of his fellow cricketers from neighbouring Denton - the games also traced a pathway of more intimate networks between members of the rural middling sort. Finally, the invisible benefits of association for active members of the urban middling sort identified by Barry – notably, that education in the tension between ‘self control and obedience to others, between competition and cooperation, between restraint and liberality’ – is the essence of team sport. Cricket and rugby would be lauded a hundred years later in the English public schools for their ability to impart precisely this awareness.<sup>118</sup>

There is still much that we do not know about the world of village cricket. We do not know how many village teams there were, how they were organised, how often they played, on what terms, or whether the games were played for money. Equally, we know very little about who took part: was the social

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<sup>116</sup> Mullin, “We had carding”, p. 990.

<sup>117</sup> Underdown, *Start of Play*, pp 36-8, 126. Marchant, who regularly watched his son, Will, play for the parish side, was of precisely the same social group as the cricketers described here: one of the largest farmers in the parish who served as a churchwarden.

<sup>118</sup> Richard Holt, *Sport and the British: A Modern History* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 74-98, 205-206

composition of the teams encountered in this article typical, or were there also opportunities for those who ranked below the middling sort to play the game regularly?

Nevertheless the material analysed in this article adds to a gathering body of evidence that emphasizes the extent to which organised cricket was the special preserve of the middling sort in eighteenth-century rural society. The few fragmentary club constitutions that have survived all point to a prosperous membership, while the occasional autobiographical sources on which historians rely for first-hand insights into the game at this period – the diary of the farmer, Thomas Marchant, for example, or that of the East Hoathly shopkeeper, Thomas Turner - emanate from incontrovertibly middling-sort pens, and contain few suggestions that cricket was played by the whole village community.<sup>119</sup> Equally, for all that the aristocracy dominated the membership roll of the Hambledon Club, the players themselves were yeomen farmers and tradesmen. As Christopher Brookes remarked, they were individuals who undertook the ‘relatively prestigious’ village occupations – in short, the ‘middling sort’ who also dominated the parish vestry.<sup>120</sup> Further research would undoubtedly yield fresh insights and perspectives, but it might be that cricket flourished in the eighteenth century not because it was taken up by a relatively small number of aristocrats, but because it spread among the middling sorts in rural England, providing them with a new vehicle for the social display and network building as

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<sup>119</sup> Griffin, *England's Revelry*, p. 47.

<sup>120</sup> Underdown, *Start of Play*, p.127.

the English countryside settled down after the upheavals of the mid-seventeenth century.